



FEMA

Disaster News

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DON'T WAIT TO CLEAN UP A STORM DAMAGED HOME

Take special care when cleaning; floodwaters can carry sewage and hazardous chemicals.

MADISON, WI —Wisconsin residents are urged to begin the difficult task of cleaning up flooded homes and businesses as soon as it is safe to re-enter the buildings, said recovery officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM).

“Don’t wait for a visit from damage inspectors to clean up your flood-damaged house,” Ron Sherman, federal coordinating officer with FEMA, said. “Try to document the flood damages with photographs or video. Then start the hard work of thoroughly cleaning up everything that got wet to avoid future health problems.”

WEM administrator Ed Gleason warns flood victims to be especially cautious during cleanup, “Health and safety concerns should be a top priority as everyone is cleaning up. The dangers are not over because the water has receded.”

Health officials recommend that people wear rubber gloves and face masks when cleaning flood-damaged properties to protect eyes and skin from potential harm and to be aware of these health and safety issues when cleaning up after a flood:

- Floodwaters may carry sewage and chemicals from roads, farms, factories and storage buildings. The mud left in the aftermath of a flood can contain health hazards. It is extremely important to remove this mud from flood-affected structures as soon as possible, and to use care when doing so.
- The ground and floors may be covered with flood debris, including broken bottles and nails. In addition, floors and stairs that have been covered with mud can be extremely slippery.
- Food, cosmetics and medicines that came in contact with floodwaters may pose a significant threat to health. When in doubt – throw it out.

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- Watch for mold growth and be attentive to musty odors in the home. Serious problems of mold can develop within a few days causing health problems. Be sure that all wet materials are removed and the house is adequately dried out prior to rebuilding. Be aware that humidity resulting from the flood may also encourage mold growth.

If you have health and safety questions regarding flood cleanup, contact your local public health department. The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Division of Public Health recommends checking out the “Flooding Health and Safety Tips” on their web site at:

http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/dph_emsip/InjuryPrevention/Disaster/flooding.htm

First Step in Recovery: Apply for Disaster Assistance

People who were affected by the severe storms and flooding beginning May 19 should begin the disaster application process by calling **1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or TTY 1-800-462-7585** for the hearing and speech impaired. Phone lines will be available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., daily, until further notice. Applicants may be eligible for a wide range of programs such as funding for temporary disaster housing assistance, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) low-interest disaster loans for individuals and business owners to repair or replace damaged property, replacement grants for serious disaster-related needs and expenses not covered by insurance or other assistance programs, and disaster unemployment assistance.

On March 1, 2003, FEMA became part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. FEMA's continuing mission within the new department is to lead the effort to prepare the nation for all hazards and effectively manage federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates proactive mitigation activities, trains first responders, and manages Citizen Corps, the National Flood Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration.

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